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COUNTING-ROOM AND CRADLE.

BY MARION HARLAND.

A CLEVER man said a caustic thing the other day apropos to the numerous feminine enterprises represented in the Chicago Exposition. "One might imagine the fair exhibitors to be so many freaks. 'Behold!' they cry to a surprised world, 'that, *although women*, we have written books, drawn, painted and engraved pictures, edited journals, and done other wonderful works—even designed the museum in which our handiwork is displayed.'"

Without controverting or sustaining the sarcasm, the student of our times smiles at the thrust at what a lecturer of the other sex calls "The Great Awakening of the Nineteenth Century." Nobody, nowadays, talks of "the inferior sex." The weaker vessel has gone too far out of fashion ever to know renaissance at the hands of the most eccentric fancier of human fäience. The emancipation dreamed of scarce a generation ago by Fanny Wright, Harriet Martineau and Lucy Stone, is an accomplished fact. Edwin Whipple, genial essayist and courteous critic, said, early in the fifties, of Elizabeth Oakes Smith's lecture upon English poetry: "What a woman can do well, she has a right to do. Mrs. Smith has demonstrated ability and right in this lecture, which is a continuous lyric."

He struck a prophetic key-note to the enlightened public sentiment of to-day. The door set wide for her who can enter in, no man can or will shut. It would be easier to enumerate the avenues of labor that remain closed to our sex than to tell over the many they are permitted to occupy. As is altogether natural, the rush into the hitherto untrodden ways reminds the observer of the headlong race of the "Forty-niners" to the Pacific El Dorado, and the ceaseless emigration cityward of restless youth

that has depopulated some of the fairest sections of rural New England.

Thought and pen are brought to a sudden halt by this last and significant illustration. Deserted homesteads and fireless hearths may be milestones in the march of progress. They may as well be beacons of warning. The homes that now stand tenantless by the score in Massachusetts townships fed the Commonwealth up to maturity of strength.

Avoiding (intentionally and scrupulously) what we speak of as the sentimental side of our subject, let us look at the bald fact that to bear and bring up children, to administer the affairs of a household upon the integrity of which depend the health, comfort and happiness of those who are to make history when their progenitors are with the forgotten dead, is a profession in itself, and an important one. Motherhood and homemaking are women's untransferable missions. Men may write her books, or paint her pictures, or conduct her financial and benevolent enterprises so well as to leave her generation nothing to regret in her withdrawal from one or all of these spheres of action. When she demits the duty of maternity the whole creation cannot supply a substitute. When children reluctantly brought into being are consigned to the companionship and tutelage of hirelings and aliens in blood, the family has no advantages above the *crèche*; home and boarding-school become interchangeable terms.

That the writer of this paper has said this, in effect, over and over again, and that other women, not to mention men, have said it yet more forcibly, proves the imminent importance of the hackneyed subject. It is evidence, furthermore, of the startling truth that many of our sex turn a deaf ear to the whispers of Nature, or are slow to learn lessons set by the observation and experience of others.

It is the deserved reproach of American girls that they are educated for anything and everything except for motherhood. Lovers of their kind are wise in raising the question in this Year of Our Lord, 1893, if it be practicable for a woman to discharge aright the offices belonging to wife, mother and housekeeper and at the same time carry on a trade or profession involving the necessity of absence from her home daily during business hours. A popular journal, conducted by a progressive woman, lately opened its columns to the free discussion of the query—

“Should business women marry?” So far as I have been able to follow the debate, the weight of opinion leans rather towards establishing the right of every woman, wedded or single, to support herself and improve such talents as Providence has endowed her with, than to the demonstration of certain stubborn truths which are patent to the candid philanthropist.

Dealing still with the practical phase of the problem, we observe that most women who resort daily to places of business as copyists, clerks or merchants, are not in circumstances which justify them in hiring efficient housekeepers, or even competent servants. The matutinal paragon of proverbial fame, who rose while it was yet right to oversee the servants’ early breakfast, was fain to prime her lord with trustworthy counsel before he took leave of her to go forth fearlessly for conference with the elders in the gate. She tarried at home to take a hand at the wool and flax-wheels, to gird her loins with strength for following the maids from room to room, and strengthen her arms by plying broom and distaff. She considered a field and bought it, and invested her private store (probably butter-and-egg money) in a young vineyard, yet looked diligently after the ways of her household, including the education of her children.

The law that formerly stood upon the statute-books of slaveholding States forbidding the sale of a child under ten years of age, unless the mother were included in the bargain, was founded in eternal justice and humanity. The birthright of every sentient thing is what old-fashioned people termed “mothering.” The word in its quaint aptness expresses a constancy of enfolding, guarding, brooding devotion which no other earthly relation makes obligatory. During most of the child’s waking hours the mother must be within hearing of the exquisite machinery she has set in motion. However engrossing other occupations may be, one side of her must be awake to call or cry; she must be ready, as a loving dictator, to encourage good and to repress wrong. The seeds of physical and moral maladies, if overlooked, will work their wicked will in the years to come, when rootlets, that are tender threads now, will be as tough as steel and defy a giant’s strength.

In a Broadway shop window sits a man whom I have named to myself “the Lord of Shalott.” His back is to the outer world; before him is a frame filled with a neutral-tinted web. Selecting bit

by bit from a heap of colored wools beside him, he fashions slowly designs familiar to us in the oriental rugs, whose antiquity is their value, which under the tread of the centuries bloom into sheen art cannot emulate. Such is the work of the mothers of the land. In tens of thousands of homes they are weaving in hand-looms tapestry which is to outlive the stars.

Women, as a rule, are deficient in right appreciation of the laws of proportion. This partially accounts for the circumstance that, while that man has never yet been found who would change his sex if he could, many women freely avow that they wish they had been born men. The dash and excitement of combat in the open field ensnare our heroine's fancy, and belittle, by contrast, in her eyes the nicer processes that prepare the soldier for the campaign. She is not content with her craft of artificer of the weapons and instruments without which there would be no public triumphs to record.

Mothers of a different grade from that which furnishes readers of prominent Reviews, who bear their part in Congresses of Representative Women, compass the feat of bringing counting-room and cradle into harmonious coöperation, but in a fashion which their educated sisters would disdain to imitate. Behind the little shop tendered by madame or frau, and visible through the open door of communication, is the family living-room and nursery. When the baby—and there is always one in arms—refuses to lie quietly in the cradle or to sit upon the floor, the mother serves her customers with him upon her shoulder or lap. He is petted, fed and disciplined with like frank disregard of conventionalities. She is a shrewd business woman, a fond and, according to her lights, a faithful parent, troubling her brain with no fine-drawn disquisitions. The shop must be looked after, the baby is *here*! What would you? She and hers will possess this land of the Pilgrims' pride in due time.

For, side by side with feminine ambition to do a man's work in the outer world has grown the disposition to regard the advent of children in the abodes of our so-called better classes, as, at the best, an expensive luxury. They handicap the aspirant for fame; they make a mock of routine, claiming all seasons for their own; they clothe with forceful meaning the phrase "limitations of sex;" but these extremely lively stones are the material with which the Temple of the Future is to be built.

Our woman of advanced ideas must make choice between two avocations, each of which demands singleness of purpose and the best powers of mind and body. She is wise above what is written by enthusiastic leaders into what is the new world to her, and the old to her brothers, if she comprehend that the road for her must for a while lead uphill. While she is no longer excluded from the business arena, she contends there with disadvantages unknown to men. However heroic the training for her chosen career may have been, the atmosphere of the commercial, and, in a less degree, of the professional world strikes her as harsh and raw. Men's ways are not her ways ; she cannot learn all at once to put her sensibilities safely out of reach ; the strife for mastery shocks her ideas of the equity of reciprocal benefits ; her nerves, physical and spiritual, lie too near the surface to allow her to compete upon equal terms with those who are prepared for this sort of work by precedent, birth, and physical conformation.

Women do themselves gross injustice and are unconsciously cruel to their sisters when they combat the truth of their bodily unfitness to toil after the manner of men, as many hours *per diem*, week in and week out, and throughout the year. Under the finest conditions of constitution and health a woman may be the superb counterpart of brother, lover or husband—the *alter ego*, that, combined with his personality, makes up the perfect human creature. She is not—she never will be—his faithful re-presentment. In denying this natural law, she arrogates as her own a form of creation unknown to God and to man. In contending for the equality of the sexes, her ambition has overleaped the bounds that masculine daring has set for itself. She would unite in her one person the distinctive qualities and the loftiest possibilities of both sexes. For the Damascus blade that cuts cleanly through the down cushion, she covets the solid weight of the cleaver.

Nature, as interpreted by the sages of all ages, divides between the sexes the labor of developing the race up to its highest type. Reasoning together with a right sense of woman's worth in the vast scheme, our counsellors plead that since she, and none else, can fulfil certain duties, she cannot decline them without fatal injury to the great system. Nobody doubts her ability to keep accounts, to buy and to sell, to practise law and medicine, and expound theology. Celibate, she can engage in and carry on any of

these emprises with success contingent upon ability and opportunity. It is a simple statement of a principle as self-evident as that two substances cannot occupy the same space at the same time, that she cannot play the man in a calling which requires all her thoughts and energies for seven, eight or ten hours out of the twenty-four, and be very woman to home, spouse and children. As soon might the mainspring of a watch essay to run a corn-mill while regulating the cogs, wheels and levers to which it is adjusted.

When necessity binds upon the mother the grievous burden of bread-winning abroad and bringing up a family of young children at home, she must, perforce, submit to the maiming of one side of her life—and, with faith in Heaven and in herself, do her best. Were her children utterly orphaned, they would be dragged up after a fashion, taking their chances of ruin or salvation. If she go forth at morning unto her work, and to her labor until the evening, committing her darlings to fate and hirelings—or, if she be more fortunate, to her nearest of kin—she selects the lesser of two evils, and deserves our respectful compassion.

The fact that the demands of fashionable society are more inimical to the multiplication and growth of olive plants in modern nurseries than the nobler ambition to achieve independence or reputation by the employment of native talents, has no relevance to the matter now before us.

Every sensible spectator of the existence that has no worthier aim than display which is vulgar, and amusements that are selfish and puerile, resents comparison between the gauzy-winged ephemeron, dizzied by electric light, and her whose scorn of the traditional bondage to sex is founded in consciousness of innate superiority to the typical butterfly and also to the storied and priggish ant. She will make something of herself better and higher than either. Nothing in the texture of man's brain, when compared with a woman's, warrants the dogma that he is to be an independent being, and hers a parasitic growth. The admonition to cautious circumspection of speech and look in places where business men do congregate provokes a proud smile. "Temptations"—vaguely portrayed by timorous spinsters—simply do not exist for her. A single aim and a steadfast purpose are the lion of this latter-day Una.

Often—as breadwinner for others more helpless than herself—she has, to all intents and purposes, assumed the man's place. She has no leisure for thought that involves planning and provision for domestic needs, from her departure in the gray winter morning until she lets herself into the hall with her latch-key at evening. Craft or profession absorbs mental and nervous forces. Sooner or later, home—an empty echo of a monosyllable when the feminine element is lacking—becomes a harbor into which she puts occasionally for repairs. She is a seafarer—as all her fathers (but not her mothers) were. As a man's substitute in counting-room, shop and office, her success cannot be gainsaid. Into the manufacture of the substitute has gone all she had to give of mental and physical power. The graft has thriven lustily, but the native branches have been pruned to make room for the alien. If the result satisfy her, it is because she has unsexed herself. If longings for the shelter, the sacred joys and loves of wifehood and motherhood have survived throughout the unnatural process, she is an object of pity.

That there are many women in our own and other lands who have won distinction with pen, brush and chisel—have given to a grateful world the results of exhaustive research into the deep things of nature and of science, without neglecting one of the holy tasks devolving upon wife and housemother—relieves what may seem to be the hard sentence which we believe that Providence and experience have pronounced. She who keeps abreast intellectually with her growing boys and girls, and gives her husband cogent reason for safely trusting in her judgment and good sense, will not fall out of line with her generation. The home-life of a well-appointed household affords facilities for study and mental growth unsuspected by those who have never brought business habits into domestic practice. Servants are better, and children happier for the wise ruling that makes of the family a working community wherein individual taste and habit are consulted and scope is granted for the exercise of each, and where the highest good of all is the law of daily living.

The Presence that informs such an organization is practically limitless in influence. Time and eternity are debtors to it.

MARION HARLAND.